THE RAJPUT CONFEDERATION OF CHAMBAL AND THE CONQUEST OF ERACH:

A Military Study of the Kalpi Sultanate - Rajput Conflict

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Abstract: This study examines the invasion of Erach in 1409 A.D (present-day Jhansi district) by the Rajput Confederation of Chambal, undertaken at the invitation of a noble of the Kalpi Sultanate. It reconstructs the political and military circumstances of the campaign, critically evaluates the course of the conflict, and reassesses the exaggerated claims surrounding Bihamad Khani through a logical analysis of his contemporary source

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Introduction

During the Rajput Rebellion of c. 1388, Maharajadhiraj Shooruddharan Deva Chauhan of Etawah (*identified in Persian chronicles as Rai Sumer or Sabir*) led a Rajput confederation comprising the neighbouring rulers of Gwalior, Hathkant, Bhongaon, Chandrawar, and Khor. After defeating two major armies of the Delhi Sultanate near Agra, the confederation advanced into territories controlled by the Sultanate's Turk nobles.[1]

At that time, Malikzada Mahmud, who later became the Sultan of Kalpi, belonged to a family that had long served the Delhi Sultanate. His father had held the office of *Wā'lī-i-Shiq*[2] *of* Firozpur[3] to monitor the strategically important frontier, including the Bhadauria-held region of Kanawar, referred to in Persian sources as Mauza-i-Kanawaran. During the campaign of c. 1388, the Rajput confederation invaded the Shiq of Firozpur. Malikzada Mahmud was decisively defeated and forced to flee the battlefield. The Rajput forces pursued him as far as the town of Munj[4] and seized all of his possessions[5]. This humiliating defeat appears to have left a lasting impression on Malikzada Mahmud, who thereafter resolved to subdue the Rajput states of the Chambal region. Around 1393 CE, the Sultan Nasiruddin Mohammed Shah III Tughlaq of Delhi, seeking to punish the Rajputs for their capture of Bilgram (in present-day Kasganj district), launched a campaign against Etawah. During the siege, he was joined by Malikzada Mahmud. However, Etawah's strong fortifications prevented the allied forces from achieving success, and

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[1] Radha Kamal Mukherjee, *Uttar Pradesh District Gazetteers: Agra* (1965), 37.
[2] Wā'lī is an administrative title used in the Muslim world to designate the governor of an administrative division.
[3] The Shiq of Firozpur *(26.609° N, 79.109° E)* is located on the left bank of the Yamuna River in present-day Etawah district, Uttar Pradesh, approximately 30 km from Kanawar village in Ater tehsil, Bhind district, Madhya Pradesh.
[4] Munj (26.8937° N, 79.1597° E) is a small village situated in the present-day Etawah district, Uttar Pradesh.
[5] Mohammad Bihamad Khani, *Tarikh-i-Mohammadi* (trans. Mohd. Zaki), 27.

both armies were eventually forced to abandon the siege. Following Amir Timur's invasion in 1398 CE, Malikzada Mahmud declared his independence and established the Kalpi Sultanate.

About a decade later, around 1409 CE, the Sultan of Kalpi invaded Prayagraj and Arail with the stated objective of suppressing the "infidels." According to the author, the two cities were devastated, their inhabitants were subjected to severe hardship, and numerous pilgrims who had gathered to worship were taken captive, possibly during the Kumbh Mela. During this campaign, the Sultan received urgent news that Sulaiman bin Daud Chap had rebelled against his authority and assumed the royal insignia of *Chatr* and *Chaudol* [6] without the Sultan's permission, Sulaiman launched a surprise night attack on Majlis Ali Nizam Khan, who was encamped at the mauza of Kandal, inflicting significant losses. Enraged by the rebellion, the Sultan immediately abandoned his campaign and marched rapidly to Irich (Erach), where he laid siege to the fort.[7] To reinforce the siege, the Sultan of Malwa, Dilawar Khan, the *Zabit* of the *Khitta* of Dhar, arrived with a large army owing to his close ties with the Sultan. Facing the overwhelming strength of the Sultan's forces, Sulaiman bin Daud Chap sought assistance from the neighbouring Rajput chiefs and other regional powers in an effort to defend his position and preserve his authority.

Battle of Erach c. 1409

Mohammad Bihamad Khani records that:

″ Sumer, the leader of the infidels and the seditious group, together with all the great Rais and the leading Muqaddams, reached the environs of the Khitta of Irich to assist Sulaiman bin Daud Chap and encamped on the banks of the Betvi (Betwa) River.″

The Rajput confederation assembled in support of Sulaiman bin Daud Chap comprised several prominent rulers and chiefs, including *Maharajadhiraj* Shooruddharan Deva Chauhan of Etawah, Rajadhiraj Udairaj Deva Bhadauria of Hathkant (Bhadawar), Rajadhiraj Veerbhan Deva Chauhan of Bhongaon, Rajadhiraj Viram Deva Tomar of Gwalior, the Sengar Raja along with the chiefs of Kanargarh and Phaphund, and Rawat Brahma Deva of Kanawar.[8] Based on the number of participating rulers, the size of their territories, and the military strength they likely commanded, the Rajput confederation may have fielded an army of about 100,000–120,000 soldiers. Muhammad Bihamad Khani describes this force as too large to be counted. The allied Rajput army marched towards Irich (Erach) through Gwalior and camped on the banks of the Betwa River before facing the Sultan's army.

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[6] Chatr (or Chhatra) is the ceremonial royal umbrella, symbolizing royal authority and sovereignty. *Chaudol* is a palanquin carried by four retainers, its name being derived from *chau* ("four") and *dol* ("palanquin" or "to carry"), referring to its four bearers.

[7] Mohammad Bihamad Khani, *Tarikh-i-Mohammadi* (trans. Mohd. Zaki), 67.

[8] Bihamad Khani specifically mentions the participation of the leading *Rāʾīs* of Hathkant, Bhongaon, Kanar, Phaphund, and Gwalior in the confederation. Among the leading *Muqaddams* (or *Rawats*), he identifies the chief of the *mauza* of Kanawaran, corresponding to the modern village of Kanawar, historically associated with the Rawat sept of the Bhadaurias.

Bihamad Khani writes that the Sultan, believing it to be his religious duty, decided to fight the Rajput confederation. However, before beginning the battle, he delayed the attack in the hope that the Rajputs would give up their religion and accept Islam. According to the chronicler, the Rajputs were confident because of their large army and believed that the Sultan's forces could not defeat them. As a result, they launched the first attack. Bihamad claims that the Muslim army won a decisive victory. It states that the Rajput infantry fled before the Sultan's soldiers had fully engaged them with swords and bows. Bihamad Khani further describes the battle by saying that the Muslim troops killed many Rajputs with swords, arrows, and spears until "streams of blood flowed" and vultures gathered over the battlefield. He also claims that the Sultan ordered a tower of severed Rajput heads to be built near Khitta of Irich (Erach) to frighten other "infidels" and rebels. The Muslim army also captured many horses, prisoners of war, and other valuable booty.

After the defeat, Sulaiman bin Daud Chap, who had led the rebellion against the Sultan, sought forgiveness. He sent Shaikhs, Ulama, Saiyyids, pious men, and Qazis as his representatives to request mercy. Through them, he declared himself a loyal servant of the Sultan's house and appealed to the Sultan's generosity. Bihamad Khani concludes his account by praising the Sultan as a ruler known for his piety, wisdom, honesty, patience, and generosity. According to the chronicler, the Sultan accepted Sulaiman's submission and granted him a full pardon.[9]

Criticism and Arguments

If Bihamad Khani's claim that the Rajputs were completely defeated and brought under the Sultan's control at Erach is accepted, an important historical question arises: why did the Sultan have to launch couple of major campaigns against the same Rajput states around 1410 CE?[10] A truly decisive victory would normally have removed the need for another large-scale military expedition so soon. Moreover, neither Bihamad Khani nor any other contemporary source mentions the collection of tribute or taxes such as *Malguzari*, *Peshkash*, *Jizya*, or *Kharaj*[11] from the supposedly defeated Rajput rulers. In the Indo-Islamic political tradition, the payment of such taxes usually marked the submission of conquered chiefs. The absence of any such evidence casts doubt on Bihamad Khani's claim of a complete and permanent Rajput defeat. Instead, it suggests that the chronicler may have exaggerated the scale and outcome of the Sultan's victory, as was common in medieval Persian court histories.

Bihamad Khani's claim that the Rajputs fled "before the Sultan's soldiers had fully engaged them with their swords and bows" appears questionable. If the Rajput army had really collapsed at the very beginning of the battle, the Sultan's forces would most likely have pursued and destroyed the retreating army. However, the chronicle does not mention any such pursuit or the capture of the Rajput rulers. On the contrary, the Rajputs remained strong enough to confront the Sultan

[9] *Ibid*, 68.

[10] *Ibid*, 61-62.

[11] Malguzari denoted the regular land revenue collected from agricultural lands under a ruler's authority. Peshkash was a tribute paid by subordinate or defeated rulers in acknowledgment of the suzerainty of a superior sovereign. Jizya was a poll tax imposed on non-Muslim adult males under Islamic rule, while Kharaj was a land tax levied on conquered territories, often including the domains of non-Muslim rulers. The imposition of such fiscal obligations generally served as a formal acknowledgment of political submission within the Indo-Islamic administrative system.

again in the following year. This was also not the first long-distance military campaign undertaken by the Rajput Confederation. In March c. 1393, they successfully invaded and captured the town of Bilgram[12] (in present-day Kasganj district). In response, the Delhi Sultan Nasir ud-Din Muhammad III, accompanied by the future Sultan of Kalpi, marched against Etawah, the Rajput capital, and laid siege to its fort. However, the fort's strong defences forced the invading army to withdraw without success.[13] These earlier campaigns show that the Rajput Confederation was experienced in both offensive warfare and the defence of fortified positions. This makes Bihamad Khani's account of their sudden collapse at Erach less convincing.

In medieval warfare, rulers undertaking long-distance campaigns usually secured their supply lines and maintained a steady flow of provisions. The Rajput Confederation's successful march to Erach (Jhansi), supported by the regional alliance of Sulaiman bin Daud Chap, suggests that the campaign was carefully planned and well supplied. This indicates that the confederation possessed a high level of military organization and enjoyed strong regional support. By contrast, the Sultans of Kalpi repeatedly failed to achieve lasting success in their campaigns against the Chambal region, and their armies eventually withdrew from Rajput territory. This comparison makes Bihamad Khani's claim that the Rajput Confederation collapsed easily at Erach less convincing. Lastly, Sulaiman bin Daud was pardoned after the battle and restored to the *iqta* of Erach. Then suddenly it states that Sulaiman died, his son submitted to the Sultan, and his descendants later rebelled before fleeing from Kalpi with a small cavalry. If Sulaiman's family had truly been restored as the rulers of Erach, it is difficult to explain why they fled from Kalpi instead of defending their own seat at Erach. It is equally surprising that the Sultan, who had earlier been determined to crush Sulaiman's rebellion, is not recorded as launching any campaign against these later rebels. Instead, the administration of Erach was transferred to the Sultan's brother**,** Azam Humayun, suggesting that the earlier political arrangement had broken down. These inconsistencies raise serious doubts about the reliability of the account and suggest that the events surrounding Sulaiman's pardon and the Sultan's control over Erach were more complex than the chronicle describes.

Conclusion

Taken together, the available evidence suggests that Bihamad Khani's account of the Battle of Erach must be treated with caution. While there is little reason to question the occurrence of a major military engagement, the chronicler's assertions regarding the complete defeat and enduring subjugation of the Rajput Confederation are not corroborated by the subsequent political and military developments. The absence of any evidence for the imposition of tribute or taxation, the Sultan's renewed campaign against the same Rajput states in the following year, the continued military resilience of the Rajput Confederation, and the internal inconsistencies surrounding the pardon of Sulaiman bin Daud and the administration of Erach collectively undermine the credibility of the chronicler's narrative of a decisive and permanent victory. Rather, the available evidence suggests that the Rajput Confederation briefly occupied Erach before the Sultan subsequently re-established his authority over the region. Consequently, Bihamad Khani's narrative is best understood not as an objective account of the annihilation and permanent subjugation of the Rajputs, but as a conventional example of medieval Persian court

[12] *Ibid,* 42.
[13] *Ibid,* 43.

historiography, in which a limited military success was amplified into a triumphalist narrative of complete victory, reflecting the literary and ideological conventions of the genre rather than the full complexity of historical events.

Bibliography

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